

Test's top spot at stake

England-South Africa series starts at The Oval today

 **Cricket**
AFP, London

England will defend their ranking as the top Test team in the world when they come up against a strong South African side in the first of three Test matches at The Oval on Thursday.

The pre-match build-up has concentrated on two outstanding fast bowling attacks -- but, as England fast bowler James Anderson and South African all-rounder Jacques Kallis pointed out on Tuesday, the bowlers will have to get past some outstanding batsmen.

"It's the two best teams in the world," said Anderson. "Both bowling attacks have been successful over the past 12 to 18 months but if you look at both batting line-ups they're potentially as strong as well. It's going to be a clash of two really good teams."

Meanwhile Kallis added: "It's going to be an interesting battle to see who comes out on top. Both sides have got good batters as well. It's going to be a fantastic series."

South Africa edged England 2-1 in 2008, the last time the two teams met in

England, but England have been unbeaten at home since then, rising to number one in the world rankings under captain Andrew Strauss and coach Andy Flower.

However, South Africa have not lost an away series since they were beaten in Sri Lanka in 2006. They are ranked third but will take the top place from England if they win the series.

Anderson, Stuart Broad and Tim Bresnan have become a formidable fast bowling force for England.

But South Africa have some heavy artillery as well in Dale Steyn, the world's top-ranked bowler, the tall Morne Morkel and the accurate Vernon Philander, who has taken 51 wickets at an average of 14.15 since making his debut against Australia last November.

England may have an advantage in spin bowling, where off-spinner Graeme Swann has a superior record to South African leg-spinner Imran Tahir, who has yet to make a major impact at Test level.

South Africa will go into the series with minimal preparation.

They had a three-day camp in Switzerland, during which they climbed mountains and got out of their normal 'comfort zones', followed by a two-day

match against Somerset and a three-day match against Kent.

Both matches were affected by rain and the tourists were unable to dominate against two relatively weak teams.

But Kallis is convinced the preparation has been ideal and that South Africa are ready to hit form from the start of the series.

South Africa have never won in 10 matches at The Oval and have lost all three Tests at the venue since returning to international cricket in 1991.

Remarkably on each of the latter occasions they lost despite winning the toss and batting first. All three Tests were the last matches of a series.

TEAMS

ENGLAND (from): Andrew Strauss (captain), Alastair Cook, Jonathan Trott, Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell, Ravi Bopara, Matt Prior, Tim Bresnan, Stuart Broad, Graeme Swann, James Anderson, Steven Finn, Graham Onions.

SOUTH AFRICA (likely): Graeme Smith (captain), Alviro Petersen, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, AB de Villiers, Jacques Rudolph, JP Duminy, Vernon Philander, Dale Steyn, Morne Morkel, Imran Tahir.

England's Onions scare

AFP, London

Graham Onions's chances of playing in the first Test against South Africa receded further on Wednesday when he was unable to train on the eve of the match at The Oval because of a hamstring strain.

The Durham seamer, included in England's 13-man squad as an extra pace bowler, was not involved in Wednesday morning's net practice.

He has not yet been ruled out of contention to play when the first of a three-Test series starts here on Thursday, but the injury has not done his prospects any good.

Even if fully fit, Onions was regarded as unlikely to fill a third seamer role, where incumbent Tim Bresnan and fast bowler Steven Finn appear to be the leading candidates for the position.

No room for Pattinson & Lyon

AFP, Sydney

Paceman James Pattinson and off-spinner Nathan Lyon were Wednesday left out of Australia's provisional 30-man squad for the World Twenty20 in Sri Lanka.

Off-spinning allrounder Glenn Maxwell and left-handed batsman Rob Quiney, who have no international experience, were the big winners.

"The ICC World Twenty20 will be a fiercely contested tournament," said selector John Inverarity.

"A great deal of flamboyant cricketing talent will be on display and some games will be turned on their heads by 10 minutes of brilliance. The squad announced today is full of talent, enterprise and all-round strength.

"Within the 30 players named is depth and cover for all departments within the team."

Maxwell's selection came as no surprise after being picked for the series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates in early September.

PROBABLES

George Bailey, Travis Birt, Dan Christian, Pat Cummins, Xavier Doherty, James Faulkner, Aaron Finch, Ryan Harris, Ben Hilfenhaus, Brad Hogg, David Hussey, Michael Hussey, Mitchell Johnson, Ben Laughlin, Mitchell Marsh, Shaun Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Andrew McDonald, Clint McKay, Dirk Nannes, Stephen O'Keefe, Tim Paine, Rob Quiney, Steven Smith, Mitchell Starc, Adam Voges, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Shane Watson, Cameron White.

Yuvi among probables

AFP, New Delhi

 **Cricket**
India on Wednesday picked Yuvraj Singh, who is recovering from cancer, in a 30-man preliminary squad for the World Twenty20 to be played in Sri Lanka later this year.

The 30-year-old, regarded as one of the most flamboyant batsmen in world cricket, completed chemotherapy in the United States in April after being diagnosed with a rare germ-cell tumour between his lungs early last year.

Yuvraj, who has not played competitive cricket since the two home Tests against the West Indies in November, only recently began light training at the National Cricket Academy in Bangalore.

It is not certain that Yuvraj will be selected in the final 15-man squad that must be finalised by mid-August for the September 18-October 7 tournament.

The left-hander will need to play club cricket in the intervening period if he is to remain a serious contender for the tournament.

Yuvraj, speaking in an International Cricket Council television show last month, declined to give a time frame on being match-fit.

"I've done six or seven sessions of very light training and very light yoga," he said. "I'm just getting back into the groove of being a normal person."

"I can't really give a timeframe but I have to see how my body is recovering and how

fast I can come on the field. I might take six months, I might take two months. So I don't know.

"But the day I feel 100 percent I surely will be back."

Yuvraj played a key role in India's 50-over World Cup triumph last year, scoring 362 runs and taking 15 wickets in nine matches to be named the man of the tournament.

He rose to fame when he smashed England's fast bowler Stuart Broad for six sixes in one over during the inaugural World Twenty20 in South Africa in 2007, which India went on to win.

India failed to reach the semifinals in the next two editions in 2009 in England and 2010 in the West Indies.

Off-spinner Harbhajan Singh, who has been out of favour since the England tour last year, was also named in the preliminary squad announced by the Indian board in a media release.

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Suresh Raina, Ravichandran Ashwin, Pragyan Ojha, Umesh Yadav, Ashok Dinda, Ajinkya Rahane, Manoj Tiwary, Rahul Sharma, Vinay Kumar, Zaheer Khan, Yuvraj Singh, Robin Uthappa, Irfan Pathan, Yusuf Pathan, Mandeep Singh, Piyush Chawla, Ravindra Jadeja, Shikhar Dhawan, Ambati Rayudu, Harbhajan Singh, Munaf Patel, Naman Ojha, Dinesh Karthik, Praveen Kumar, Lakshmi pathy Balaji.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka skipper Mahela Jayawardene (L) jokes with his India counterpart Mahendra Singh Dhoni during a press conference in Colombo on Wednesday. The two teams will play a series of five one-day internationals starting in Hambantota on July 21 and a one-off Twenty20 match on August 7.

Money no issue: PCB

 **Cricket**
AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket chiefs on Wednesday dismissed reports they had sought a share of revenues from their planned tour of India later this year -- the arch-rivals' first series in five years.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) spokesman Nadeem Sarwar told AFP the first priority was to revive cricket with India and money had not been a consideration.

India announced on Monday they will host Pakistan for a short series of three one-day internationals and two Twenty20s in December-January, ending a five-year deadlock sparked by the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008.

"Pakistan's first priority was to revive ties with India and PCB chairman Zaka Ashraf was focused on that. We wanted to take a start and for that we were negotiating since October last year," said Sarwar.

Tour revenues normally go to the host nation, but reports in Indian media sug-

gested Pakistan wanted the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to split the money. Television rights alone for an India-Pakistan series are estimated to be worth 25 million dollars but the figure could be much higher given India's vast TV audiences.

"Such reports about the proposal of revenue sharing for India-Pakistan series have no relevance and do not express the views of the PCB. The revenue sharing thing never came under discussion," Sarwar said.

In talks about reviving the matches last year, the then-PCB chairman Ijaz Butt demanded a 50-50 share of revenue, which India refused.

The BCCI said Tuesday they were hopeful of getting the necessary clearance for the series from New Delhi.

Although India and Pakistan have met in events like the World Cup and Asia Cup, their last bilateral series was in 2007, when the Pakistani team visited India.

Cricketing ties between the arch-rivals were suspended after the Mumbai attacks, blamed on Pakistan-based militant group.



PHOTO: STAR

(From L) Victorious Cicerone players Hasib, Gautam, Ali, Parag and Rocky pose for photographs after winning the men's team event in the Lotto Open Table Tennis Competition at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Wooden Floor Gymnasium in Paltan yesterday.

LOTTO OPEN TT Cicerone win men's crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Cicerone Table Tennis Club emerged champions in the Lotto Open Table Tennis Competition with a 3-1 win over Sheikh Russel KC at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Wooden Floor Gymnasium in Paltan yesterday.

Hasib of Cicerone defeated Mahub of Sheikh Russel by 11-9, 11-3 and 11-9 sets in the first match before Rocky beat Hasib of Sheikh Russel by 6-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-5 and 12-10 to make it 2-0.

Parag suffered defeat against Mostafa by 12-10, 7-11, 11-5, 4-11, 11-13 before Hasib made a miraculous comeback to defeat Manosh by 6-11, 8-11, 11-8, 11-9 and 11-9 as Cicerone completed a 3-1 win to clinch men's team event title.

In women's singles event, Rumi of Destiny TT Club was crowned champion as she defeated Akhi of Abahani 11-8, 6-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-4. Before the final, Rumi had beaten her teammate Snigdha 4-2 while Akhi beat Turbina of Eleven Star 4-3 to move into the final.

Antor of BKSP clinched the title of un-seeded boys' singles after beating his teammate Swadhin 3-0. Antor and Swadhin had earlier beaten Akash of Armanitola and Dipta of BKSP respectively in the semifinals to ensure the final berth.

The final of men's singles will be held today, said a press release.

KP's hope evaporates?

AFP, London



Kevin Pietersen's dream of helping England defend their World Twenty20 title appeared to have been dashed when he was left out Wednesday of an initial 30-man squad for this year's edition in Sri Lanka.

Pietersen, England's man-of-the-tournament when they won the World Twenty20 in the Caribbean two years ago -- their first major limited overs title -- recently retired from all white ball internationals.

The South Africa-born batsman wanted to continue to play Twenty20 matches while opting out of 50 overs per side one-day international fixtures.

But England said the terms of his central contract meant he had to be available for both of those formats and that the only alternative was to quit all limited overs international cricket, which he duly did.

Team officials were concerned that if they granted Pietersen his wish England, now on a 10-match winning streak in ODIs, would see several other leading players also quit one-dayers.

Pietersen, who remains one of the first-choice picks for the Test side, suggested last week he would return to one-day internationals if something could be done about making sure he wasn't burnt out by England's packed schedule.

But the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) held firm to their stance that players cannot "pick and choose" which limited overs matches they play in.

England's most recent Twenty20, a seven-wicket win over the West Indies at Trent Bridge last month, saw Alex Hales make 99 in the opener's spot recently vacated by Pietersen.

Hales was duly included in a 30-man squad where his Nottinghamshire colleague Stuart Broad remains captain.

Seam bowler Broad, a talented lower order batsman, was one of seven survivors from the team that beat Australia in the 2010 final in Barbados along with batsmen Michael Lumb, Craig Kieswetter, Eoin Morgan, all-rounders Luke Wright and Tim Bresnan and off-spinner Graeme Swann.

This squad also included Alastair Cook, England's one-day captain and Strauss's opening partner in Tests, in-form batsman Ian Bell and Test wicket-keeper Matt Prior, an alternative behind the stumps to Kieswetter.

The issue of Pietersen's availability for the World Twenty20, which gets underway in September, has overshadowed the build-up to the first Test against South Africa at The Oval, headquarters of his county side Surrey, starting on Thursday.

But England Test captain Andrew Strauss, speaking before the World Twenty20 squad was

announced on Wednesday, insisted his side had not been distracted.

England, in common with all other competing teams, will have to trim their squad to 15 players next month.

PROVISIONAL SQUAD

Stuart Broad, (captain), James Anderson, Jonathan Bairstow, Gareth Batty, Ian Bell, Ravi Bopara, Scott Borthwick, Tim Bresnan, Danny Briggs, Jos Buttler, Alastair Cook, Steven Croft, Steven Davies, Jade Dernbach, Steven Finn, Alex Hales, Craig Kieswetter, Michael Lumb, Stuart Meaker, Eoin Morgan, Graham Onions, Samit Patel, Matt Prior, Joe Root, Ben Stokes, Graeme Swann, James Taylor, James Tredwell, Chris Woakes, Luke Wright.

Shakib, Zia & Sunny

FROM PAGE 16

Ireland began well but the introduction of spin sucked the life out of their big-hitters. Left-arm spinner Sunny took five for 13, feasting on the middle-order after getting a double-wicket maiden in the ninth over which included the dangerous Niall O'Brien. It was also his Twenty20 debut alongside Abul Hasan.

When he removed Trent Johnston in his last over, Sunny became the seventh bowler in Twenty20 internationals to take five wickets in an innings, as well as the best bowling by a Bangladeshi in the format. Sunny had taken 6-94 in his Test debut last year.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: 190-5 in 20 overs (Shakib 57, Ziaur 40*; Stirling 2-38).

IRELAND: 119-8 in 20 overs (Wilson 41*; Sunny 5-13).

Result: Bangladesh won by 71 runs.

Opening

FROM PAGE 16

The ceremony's artistic director Danny Boyle, whose film "Slumdog Millionaire" won eight Oscars, has said it would give Britons "a picture of ourselves as a nation".

But the British press has poured scorn on the plans, comparing the set to the one seen in hit children's television series "Teletubbies".

One billion people are expected to watch the ceremony around the globe, while an audience of around 62,000 will see the show in the stadium.

The budget for the opening and closing ceremonies was doubled to 81 million pounds in December, reportedly after British Prime Minister David Cameron intervened.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 "Holy mackerel!"

4 Addict

8 Catch

12 Id counterpart

13 Infamous lyrist

14 Lofty

15 Show place?

17 Crucifix

18 Blues legend

19 Nay undoer

21 That girl

22 Elbow room

26 Staffs

29 "Monty Python" opener

30 Regret

31 "Two and a Half Men" role

32 Whatever number

33 Marx or Malden

34 Roman 8-Down

35 Pledge drive station

DOWN

5 Leary's "prescription"

16 Wan

20 "Absolutely"

23 Swaddle

24 Emanation

25 Holler

26 Analgesic target

27 Hodge-podge

28 Den

29 — and outs

32 Immeasurably deep

33 Actress

35 Sagal

36 Fence component

38 Trousers statistic

39 Movies

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49 Hosp. area

Solution time: 25 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Q U J K M G B V U K B Z W B

G W C M F V - E W Z W E S Y G U M U Y C .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: INSIDE THE MAPLE SYRUP PLANT, I WONDER WHETHER EMPLOYEES WISH ONE ANOTHER MANY SAPPY RETURNS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals I